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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE ENDS H1N1 TEMPERATURE SCREENING AT BORDER

REF: A) SINGAPORE 603; B) SINGAPORE 581

1. (U) SUMMARY: There have been at least 1,200 cases of H1N1 influenza reported in Singapore. The GOS ceased temperature screening at border checkpoints on July 11 and has stopped reporting individual confirmed cases of H1N1. Instead, the Ministry of Health will only report hospitalized cases, in line with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. The GOS also ended the specialized ambulance service dedicated to suspected H1N1 cases. Such steps indicate that the GOS has nearly completed its move from containment policies to a mitigation strategy, acknowledging that the H1N1 virus is now endemic around the world and in Singapore. MOH is now focusing on: high-risk groups prone to more serious infections; conducting a review of lessons learned from the H1N1 outbreak; and preparing for another wave of outbreaks with the coming northern hemisphere flu season. End Summary.

GOS Continues to Ease Containment Measures

2. (SBU) The Ministry of Health (MOH) announced that effective July 11 all temperature screening would cease at air, land and sea border checkpoints. The GOS has stopped quarantining people seated on flights in close proximity to confirmed H1N1 cases. The last known American citizen quarantined in Singapore was released on June 27. MOH has removed travel advisories and the list of H1N1 "affected" countries from its Web site (Ref A). Following World Health Organization (WHO) guidance, MOH stopped reporting individual H1N1 cases on July 8, but the latest reports available indicated there were at least 1,200 cases in Singapore. MOH now only reports the numbers of hospitalized cases, which were 49 on July 13. MOH also ended the special ambulance service that was dedicated to transporting suspected H1N1 cases to the Communicable Diseases Center at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Only the most severe cases will be referred to hospitals, while MOH recommends that most people visit designated Pandemic Preparedness Clinics across Singapore (Ref A).

Some Inconsistencies in Implementation Persist

3. (SBU) Press reports stated that businesses, schools and other public venues no longer need to conduct their own temperature screening or contact tracing. However, there is anecdotal evidence that several locations, such as local gyms and offices, continue to screen for H1N1 symptoms like fever. Some GOS agencies have cancelled upcoming meetings with USG visitors because of concerns

about the spread of H1N1. Officers from the communications department of the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) initially turned down a meeting with visitors from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) due to H1N1. CBP later rescheduled through different GOS contacts. Embassies have been warned that Ministry of Home Affairs officials would be unlikely to meet with USG visitors due to H1N1 concerns. MFA has stated that there is no official GOS policy in place prohibiting meetings with visitors from H1N1 affected countries (Ref B). It remains to be seen how the lifting of more containment measures, such as screening at the border, will affect specific agencies' concerns about the spread of the virus.

New Areas of Focus for MOH

14. (U) Health Minister KHAW Boon Wan, speaking at a local health conference, outlined three areas where MOH will focus its efforts in coming weeks: care for high-risk groups of people more prone to serious illness from H1N1 (e.g., people with underlying medical problems); reviewing lessons learned from the outbreak of H1N1; and preparing for the next wave of infections which could come with the winter flu season in the northern hemisphere. Khaw did not provide details regarding MOH's review of lessons learned or how MOH intends to prepare for the winter flu season.

SHIELDS